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SUBJECT: DP Declares Victory; Early Lessons from the Election

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: At this point it is likely that Sali Berisha's Democratic Party (DP) coalition will emerge as the winner of the June 28. According to unofficial election results, the DP coalition has secured at least 70 seats, making the coalition the largest single coalition, and the Democratic Party the largest single party in terms of seats (68 seats vs. 65 for the opposition SP). On July 1, a candidate from the left-wing Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI) party announced that he is willing to join the DP coalition, which if true would apparently give Berisha and the DP coalition 71 seats (although this won't be official until the CEC certifies the election results, a process that could take weeks). Although the results themselves could take weeks to sort out, several broader trends from the election have already become apparent, including a dangerous over-politicization of the entire political process, consolidation of power into the hands of the two main parties, and the continued ability of a unified right wing to outfox a divided left. The bigger question for us, however, is how such a weak majority can govern effectively, let alone achieve the reforms we and this country needs. END SUMMARY.

Unofficial Results

2. (SBU) Unofficially, PM Berisha's Democratic Party coalition has secured 70 seats, compared to 66 for the opposition SP and 4 for left-wing SP rival LSI. Even though 70 seats is one short of the 71 needed for a majority in the parliament, the 70 seats for the DP coalition gives the DP the advantage in forming the new government. If the CEC eventually certifies the election outcome, DP will have the first opportunity to form a government when the new parliament convenes in early September. On July 1, an LSI candidate announced publicly that he is willing to join the DP coalition, theoretically giving the DP 71 seats. However, this declaration amounts to little more than a gentlemen's agreement until the CEC certifies the election results - including the fact that the LSI candidate actually has a seat to give to the DP - a process that could take weeks. DP Spokesperson Majlinda Bregu hinted at this supposed LSI defection when she declared victory for the DP coalition on July 1, claiming (without giving details) that the DP had secured 71 seats.

Divided the Left Falls - Again

3. (SBU) Berisha assembled a 17-party coalition for the election, while the SP cobbled together only five parties. More fatally, the SP and its left-wing rival LSI were unable to come to terms prior to the election, forcing the two parties to run as separate coalitions. Altogether, the SP and LSI coalitions totaled 11 parties. Taken as

a whole, these left wing parties received 51 percent of all votes cast, vs. 47 percent for the DP coalition. Had SP and LSI run together in one coalition, they almost certainly would have won the election. On an individual party vs. party basis, the SP outpolled the DP by the slimmest of margins, 40.85 percent to 39.99 percent.

Over-politicization of Everything

14. (SBU) ODIHR's preliminary assessment praised the professionalism of the Central Election Commission, but criticized the CEC for being divided along party lines. The ODIHR report further criticized local election commissions and local government for excessive politicization of the local election commissions. The local commissions, which are formed of members that are nominated by the parties, quickly became divided along political lines, and parties choose commission members not on the basis of integrity or competence, but rather on loyalty towards the party. Although the local commissions, as well as the bi-partisan vote counting teams, have generally worked well together, even minor disputes quickly flare into political stalemates as the parties begin giving orders to their respective commissioners.

15. (SBU) ODIHR also cited numerous cases where the government (mainly the DP-lead central government, and in fewer cases SP-lead municipal governments) pressured state employees and school children to participate in campaign rallies, as well as to vote a certain

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way. The Berisha government, and to a lesser extent Edi Rama as Mayor of Tirana, used government events such as ribbon cuttings as campaign events, complete with party flags and banners. In addition, DP heavyweights such as Foreign Minister Basha and Transportation Minister Olldashi apparently used ministry vehicles and other resources in running their campaigns in Elbasan and Fier, respectively.

Death of the Small Parties

16. (SBU) As predicted by many political analysts (and the smaller political parties themselves), the new electoral code proved to be a disaster for the smaller political parties. When the new parliament convenes in September, the DP and SP will control at least 133 of the 140 seats, as opposed to only 100 of 140 seats in the prior parliament. Of the 37 parties that contested the elections, only four received more than two percent of the vote. Whereas the PD and SP each received 40 percent, the next largest party, LSI, received only 4.8 percent of the vote. If the current results stand, SP will control 65 of the 66 seats received by its coalition.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: There will be much more backroom dealing and wheeling in weeks to come as the CEC moves towards certifying the elections and allocating seats. All the while, Sali Berisha will use all means necessary to lure more deputies into his coalition. The SP has already stated publicly that they will challenge the election results in at least two districts. Although this comes as no surprise, it could drag out the certifying process as the CEC reviews each complaint. Fortunately, the CEC has plenty of experience in adjudicating electoral challenges, and the complaint process is clearly laid out in the law, provided the CEC members don't succumb to their partisan instincts.

18. (SBU) COMMENT CONT'D: A larger problem for USG interests is how effective such a narrowly-divided political system can be. Important legislation, including reform measures crucial to us, often require an 84-seat super-majority in Parliament - hard to achieve in the currently bitterly partisan atmosphere. The DP coalition may barely cling to power, but to its governing mechanisms, not so much.